

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Secretary Clinton Calls for Orderly Transition to Democracy in Egypt

By Merle D. Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton urges an orderly and peaceful transition to democratic and economic reforms in Egypt, but also acknowledges that it will take considerable time.

In a series of television news interviews January 30, Clinton said that violence, looting or criminal acts will not move the political process forward in a productive way that will be satisfying for the Egyptian people.

Clinton appeared on “Fox News Sunday,” NBC’s “Meet the Press,” CBS’ “Face the Nation,” CNN’s “State of the Union” and ABC’s “This Week.”

Clinton told CNN’s “State of the Union” that the United States wants a “democratic Egypt that provides both political and economic rights to its people.”

“The United States wants to see the Egyptian government respond to the legitimate rights of the Egyptian people, and the creation of a process to address frustrations and reconcile various demands,” Clinton said. “The United States is advocating dialogue between the government, civil society and other stakeholders to chart the course for Egypt’s future as soon as possible.”

Clinton noted that Egypt has historically been a key U.S. partner in the region, and the United States will offer any assistance requested in speeding political and democratic reforms.

Clinton added that the United States is not backing away from, or moving toward, anyone in Egypt.

“The United States is not advocating any specific outcome in this process,” she said. “The United States will work with the existing government, whether it’s President [Hosni] Mubarak, Vice President [Omar] Suleiman, the new prime minister, or future government officials, to assist in implementing the reforms that President Mubarak described in his speech.”

“Clearly, the path that has been followed has not been one that has created that democratic future, that economic opportunity that people in the peaceful protests are seeking,” Clinton said in televised interviews.

A presidential election is scheduled for September this year, but it must be free, fair and credible, Clinton said. Mubarak has been president since 1981.

Protests in Egypt’s major cities — Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and other cities — have now continued for six days and stem from political unrest for democratic and economic reforms, rising food prices and cutbacks in subsidies, and perceptions of a lack of representative government.

Mubarak accepted the resignations of his cabinet and appointed his chief of intelligence, Omar Suleiman, vice president. It marks the first time in more than 30 years that the nation has had a vice president.

At the White House, President Obama received regular updates from his national security staff throughout January 29 and 30 after urging Egyptian President Mubarak government’s on January 28 to bring about necessary reforms, while urging security forces to refrain from violence. Obama met for an hour January 29 with the National Security Council.

A White House statement said that Obama “reiterated our focus on opposing violence and calling for restraint, supporting universal rights; and supporting concrete steps that advance political reform within Egypt.”

Obama spoke by telephone with Mubarak on January 28 and used the call to urge government restraint in response to protests while calling for reforms in Egypt.

“The United States will continue to stand up for the rights of the Egyptian people and work with their government in pursuit of a future that is more just, more free, and more hopeful,” Obama said in remarks January 28.

Debates over Spending Likely for President, Congress

By Michelle A. Brooks
Staff Writer

Washington — In his State of the Union address January 25, President Obama outlined an ambitious domestic agenda calling for increased research, development and innovation. He will need Congress’ help to make his goals a reality.

Obama’s address to the 112th Congress called for new investments in education, infrastructure and technology, among other items, so that America can increase its competitiveness. Since the legislative branch of government oversees the U.S. government’s budget, the president will have to work with Congress to obtain the funding to implement these initiatives.

For the first time in his presidency, Obama will have to work with a Republican-controlled House of Representatives. The Democrats lost their majority in the 2010 midterm elections, but narrowly retained control of the Senate.

Spending and other economic issues will likely dominate the first few months of the new Congress, two former representatives said January 26.

"We're in for some pretty tough negotiating over the next few weeks" over budget and spending, Robert Walker, a former Republican House member from Pennsylvania, told participants in a U.S. Department of State digital video conference. Walker, along with former Kansas Democratic Representative Jim Slattery, previewed what is likely in store for Congress and the administration.

"The president gave his agenda on investment in a number of different sectors ... the question that will come to the Congress, particularly the House of Representatives where the Republicans now hold a substantial majority, is whether or not all the things he mentioned last night will involve increased spending and where that money is going to come from," Walker said.

"The Congress and the president are going to have some very serious showdowns over the question of government spending and how we are going to deal with this historically high deficit," Slattery said.

Government spending and deficit was a key issue in the 2010 election, especially among so-called tea party supporters. The tea party "gave voice to this frustration" and will continue to be a factor in American politics, Slattery said.

One of the first debates will be over the federal budget, which Obama is expected to submit to Congress in mid-February. Congress will also have to consider extending a continuing resolution, a measure that allows federal agencies and programs to continue in operation for a period of time if budget appropriation bills are not passed. Current continuing resolution funds are set to run out in March. This will be one of the first tests of how well the new Congress and president will work together, Walker said.

One action the Republican-controlled House has already taken is to pass a bill repealing Obama's health care law. But that's as far as health care repeal will go, Walker and Slattery agreed, since Democrats retain a majority in the Senate.

However, there may be efforts to change elements of the law, including a likely bipartisan effort to remove a piece of the legislation that even the president acknowledged causes "an unnecessary bookkeeping burden on small businesses."

Much of the president's speech focused on domestic issues — not surprising, since "that's where the American people are right now," Slattery said. He said the main

issue is, "jobs, jobs, jobs."

Unexpected international affairs often change Congress' focus, but so too can domestic factors. For example, while many political experts are skeptical that Congress will take much action on environmental or energy issues, if gas prices continue to rise, Americans may be surprised to see Congress consider supporting construction of new nuclear power plants or increasing research of renewable energy sources.

"Historically, there are always surprises that Congress and the president just don't anticipate," Slattery said. "The president oftentimes can't control what's in front of him."

Statement on Reported Russian Deployment of SS-21 Missiles

United States Mission to the OSCE
Statement on the Reported
Russian Deployment of SS-21 Missiles
in the South Ossetia Region

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 27, 2011

The United States is also concerned about recent press reports of statements by Russian military officials regarding the deployment of an additional battalion of the Tactical Operational Missile Complex "Tochka - U" and Smerch multiple-launch rocket systems to the South Ossetia region. We urge the Russian Federation to avoid any actions that may raise tensions or could contribute to insecurity or instability in the region.

We take this opportunity to once again call for the resumption of meaningful international monitoring presences in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia. The continued absence of transparency and international monitoring in South Ossetia makes it impossible for the international community to assess reports such as these. This underscores the need for full implementation of the August 2008 cease-fire commitments agreed to by both Russia and Georgia. It is also important to redouble efforts within the OSCE to find ways to increase transparency regarding military forces and deployments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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